# *Chapter 13*
# RESHAPING CHRONICLES AND EZRA–NEHEMIAH INTERPRETATION

*Kent Harold Richards*

First and 2 Chronicles and Ezra and Nehemiah are the primary biblical documents that help us understand the Persian or Achaemenid period (sixth–fourth centuries BCE). (This period was once described as a dark age, but now the metaphor of a fertile field, giving rise to new ideas and conflicting hypotheses, is much more appropriate.) These documents, along with Esther, form the "secondary history." It tells through borrowed and reinterpreted sources, partially from the "primary history" (Genesis–2 Kings), a story of individual leaders and people, communities fighting for a renewed identity, rebuilding a temple, and gathering around God's word. We are often most impressed by the endless lists in these books, forgetting that the Mishnah reminds us that Chronicles was one of the books read before the high priest to keep him alert prior to the Day of Atonement!

This essay will discuss, first, the remarkable fact that the interpretation of Chronicles and Ezra–Nehemiah, until the last quarter of the twentieth century, has been shaped by the demand to interpret them together and not separately. Second, we need to look at Persian period studies in order to comprehend the ways they are reshaping the interpretation of these books. Third, a scenario regarding the study of these documents in their Persian period context is envisioned. Identifying the trajectories within these books and the Persian period will better help us to understand transitions in the social, religious, and political dynamics of this formative time.

## Dissolution of a Consensus

No factor in the history of the interpretation of 1 and 2 Chronicles or Ezra–Nehemiah has remained more constant than the conviction that these books must be interpreted together. Individual books of the Pentateuch,

even in precritical work, could be easily interpreted as separate; not so with 1 and 2 Chronicles (hereafter Chrons) and Ezra–Nehemiah (hereafter EN). One could read Genesis focusing on the primeval history or patriarchs and, not necessarily, reflect on Moses' last will and testament in the book of Deuteronomy. But only in the last quarter of the twentieth century has the interpretive disengagement of Chrons and EN become the dominant scholarly stance.

The interpretation of these books as bound together has depended on perceptions of their authorship. In precritical times, Ezra was thought to have been the author of this entire corpus. He is an obvious candidate given his characterization of scribe and priest. These features have been expanded outside the Hebrew canon in rabbinic traditions. There, he is characterized as a second Moses; writer and interpreter of laws; primary priest of the exilic community, and even high priest in Jerusalem; founder of a school; and the restorer of Torah. However, apart from the so-called Ezra "memoir" (Ezra 7:27–9:15; Nehemiah 8), neither Chrons nor EN provide evidence of Ezra as their author. Moreover, twentieth-century scholars have rarely maintained that Ezra was the author of these books (cf. Clines 6, 12 for the exception).

During the twentieth century various hypotheses have emerged that address the character of the first-person reports of Ezra, and, for that matter, the first-person Nehemiah accounts within Nehemiah (1–7; 12:27-43; 13:4-31). The Nehemiah "memoirs" have generally been thought to contain authentic elements, developing over time and representing a combination of genres (i.e., various types of temple or votive inscriptions, report of activities, prayer of the accused). The authenticity of the Ezra "memoirs" has been questioned more frequently. However, scholars have identified genres similar to those in the Nehemiah accounts, though also viewing the Ezra material as a midrash on the Artaxerxes edict. In no case have these discussions supported a single author hypothesis that would draw EN and Chrons together as a unitary work.

Since the mid-nineteenth century and until nearly the last quarter of the twentieth century, scholars have named the author of Chrons and EN the Chronicler. Instead of Ezra or Nehemiah each having an individual author, this Chronicler was understood to have authored/edited both EN and Chrons. Some time after the events themselves, the Chronicler constructed this history. The Chronicler has been depicted in diverse ways, as an original author, as an editor, or even a school of writers who produced several editions of the work over a number of years, maybe even several centuries. The Chronicler has been designated the author/editor not only of Chrons and EN, but also 1 Esdras (see Eskenazi, *Age*).

The development of the Chronicler hypothesis in the nineteenth century stemmed in part from the inability to attribute authorship of this sizable

corpus of Chrons and EN to Ezra or any identifiable eyewitness. The argument for the Chronicler as author/editor of both Chrons and EN was bolstered by similarities in language, ideology, thematic development, and point of view throughout these books. Blenkinsopp, a recent EN commentator and incisive interpreter of the Persian period, still argues on behalf of the Chronicler hypothesis. He suggests that Chrons and EN have a common authorship because of similarities in: (1) conceptions of temple building for the First and Second Temple; (2) views of leadership for the temple, namely, by the "head of an ancestral house"; (3) liturgical interests, descriptions of cult objects, and formulaic elements of prayers; and (4) the structural movement in each corpus from periods of "religious infidelity" to "renewal and reform" (53-54).

However, there are significant differences that reach beyond the priestly and ritual foci implicit in Blenkinsopp's enumerations. These include EN's identification of Israel with Judah as opposed to Chrons' identification of Israel with the twelve tribes; EN's use of exodus motifs and Chrons' lack of interest in early traditions; EN's non use of Davidic tradition as compared to Chrons' emphasizing the Davidic and Solomonic monarchy; EN's anti-Samarian ideas and Chrons' positive view of the North; EN's lack of prophetic dimensions as compared to Chrons; and the list might be expanded. The themes and theological perspectives are very different, which leads one to have serious reservations about common authorship of Chrons and EN.

Linguistic arguments on behalf of common authorship for these books have long been made. However, advances in linguistic analysis of Hebrew in general, and Late Biblical Hebrew in particular, have revealed flaws in such arguments. A more refined diachronic understanding of Late Hebrew has emerged, in part, based on studies of Chrons. A number of scholars (e.g., Japhet, Polzin, Throntveit, Williamson) have, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, presented analyses of the linguistic data (e.g., syntax and morphology) that challenges the notion of common authorship. Even a supporter of the Chronicler hypothesis such as Blenkinsopp notes the problems of the linguistic arguments for common authorship. The current debate is whether or not linguistic arguments can prove separate authorship in these books.

Despite the longstanding view of Chrons and EN as one entity, no manuscript tradition treats them as a single work. The manuscript tradition holds Chrons together as a single book, and EN as a single book. They were divided into four books: 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, much later in their history of transmission, i.e., in the Septuagint the division existed, but not in Hebrew editions until the fifteenth century CE.

There is an obvious connection between Chrons and EN, since the Cyrus edict that concludes 2 Chronicles (36:22-23) is repeated, nearly verbatim, in

the first lines of Ezra (1:1-4). Some have regarded this connection as indicative of common authorship. However, common authorship is not demanded or even implied by what might be regarded as an intentional compositional technique of the author. From this perspective, if one reads these books in the order that they appear in English Bibles, the repetition of these lines invites the reader to continue reading EN once having completed Chrons.

Arguments identifying this repetition of lines in Chrons and EN have been used to bind together the interpretive history of these books in the West. After all, almost all of the translations into Western languages have retained the order Chrons and then EN. While this order does exist in some Hebrew traditions, it is not the dominant one. The most prevalent order in Hebrew manuscripts and printed editions is to place Chrons at the conclusion of the Writings, with EN coming before it. In the Greek Bible, one finds a chronological arrangement of books. Hence, Ruth follows Judges and Chrons follows Kings with EN and then Esther. The majority of Greek traditions have 1 Esdras situated between Chrons and EN. This placement would lend some support to the hypothesis that the Chronicler is the author of Chrons and 1 Esdras.

The repeated lines, when not placed "end to end" as in the English Bible, do not lead the reader from one book to the other, let alone suggest the same author for both works. Some commentators have suggested that the aforementioned repetition of the Cyrus edict was accomplished precisely because it served to unite two originally disparate books. Whenever diverse authors are suggested, the lines in Chrons are usually thought to have been borrowed by Chrons from EN, since Chrons is regarded, frequently, as the later document.

The separation of Chrons from EN has influenced yet another hypothesis that has arisen in the last decade of the twentieth century, namely, that Ezra and Nehemiah represent books each with its own autonomy. However, it has been difficult to make strong arguments for autonomous thematic, structural, and linguistic tendencies in Ezra and Nehemiah (Kraemer). Nehemiah's concern with the Torah and Ezra's interest in the more priestly matters reflect major issues of Persian period Judah, but not necessarily, distinct literature.

Literary problems do exist in Ezra and Nehemiah. The fact that Nehemiah has a portion of what seems to have been a part of the first-person Ezra account (Nehemiah 8) has generated numerous debates. In Ezra, the Aramaic sections framed by Hebrew present another set of problems. Still, numerous thematic and theological motifs and structures hold the texts together. In addition, the manuscript evidence for understanding Ezra and Nehemiah as separate Hebrew books emerged only when printed editions

became available; in other words, long after authorship was determined. No concomitant hypothesis regarding the separation of 1 Chronicles from 2 Chronicles has emerged or is likely to evolve.

Literary critical analysis of EN has added support to other arguments for interpreting Chrons and EN as separate literatures. For example, Eskenazi uses characterization, point of view, and literary structure to demonstrate the way the themes of community, city-temple, and sources hold EN together as one book. In addition, Throntveit focuses on the way such literary conventions as concentricity, parallel panels, and repetitive resumptions provide the "literary architecture" of EN. And, though explicitly literary critical, other work has identified conventions that hold Chrons together. Far more prevalent in Chrons research is the identification of the genres within that corpus, and the identification of a genre for the entire work (history, commentary, theological essay, collection of sermons, historical midrash). Attention to the literary design of these forms, coupled with a growing interest in the canonical shape of biblical books, has had enormous influence in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

In sum, the common interpretive history of Chrons and EN has been significantly challenged in the last quarter of the twentieth century. This interpretive disengagement gains impetus from more than the manuscript and textual traditions. In addition, the thematic, theological, and ideological differences between Chrons and EN add further weight to the separate interpretation of these literatures. Understanding Chrons as representing one set of themes and theological perspectives and EN another set affords a new opportunity to identify the diverse perspectives that existed during this formative period of Judaism.

It is important to distinguish two books within this period, a time when the "book" was gaining enormous importance for the emerging identity of Judaism. Chronicles and EN, along with the Pentateuch, which was being codified during the Persian period, help interpreters understand the ways the written word gained authority.

Shifts in scholarly focus during the last quarter of the twentieth century have not been based on new literary, or for that matter material, evidence. Some extrabiblical literary remains have emerged, but no Elephantine type cache has been unearthed. The discoveries in the Judean desert have produced virtually no new texts or fragments of texts of these books (six lines with four legible words from Chrons). The map of Chrons and EN interpretation is being redrawn, but not because of significant new literary data. Rather the map is shifting, in part, because of the deployment of literary methods and the interpretive disengagement of Chrons and EN. Another element influencing the redrawing of this map reflects the impact of Persian period studies.

## The Impact of Persian Period Studies

Peter Ackroyd, who helped set the stage for reshaping the study of Chrons and EN, observed in 1982 that there was a need to review the material remains of the Persian period as well as to determine the connections with data from the preceding and following historical periods. This review continues today, with many more questions and no clear consensus. Moreover, some longstanding puzzles in Chrons and EN studies remain.

First, the view that Chrons is historically unreliable dates from rabbinic times. Perpetuation of the position that Chrons' history was arbitrary was supported by a comparison with parallel material in Samuel–Kings. But, when the examination of Chrons' additional material—material not included in Samuel–Kings—was considered, interpreters suggested that some material may derive from reliable sources, despite their slight distortion. This positive evaluation of nonsynoptic material led to a reconsideration of both synoptic and nonsynoptic materials.

Second, while there is still no consensus regarding Chrons as an historical work, there has been a shift away from the reliability issue. Though some still search Chrons for "facts" unique to it, the far more dominant issue involves its historiography. Since the mid-twentieth century, scholars have attempted to describe the various historiographies within the Hebrew Bible, namely, comparing Chrons' history to the Deuteronomistic History (see the essays of Knight and Wilson).

Chrons certainly relies on the earlier Deuteronomistic History, as well as on sections of the Pentateuch. Genesis is adapted by scouring the genealogies to focus on the direct connections from Adam to Israel in order to substantiate an election ordained from the foundations of the earth and conferred on Israel by God. No mention is made of extraneous individuals such as Cain. Covenants are unnecessary because of Israel's special place. The slavery-exodus-wandering traditions recede into the shadows. The laws of the Pentateuch are paraphrased, woodenly repeated, or not even mentioned. Certainly we hear more about priestly legal issues. The period of the judges seems unimportant in the telling of Chrons history. The Deuteronomistic historical framework is almost slavishly followed, but without any efforts to synchronize between Israel and Judah during the period of the divided kingdoms. After all, Chrons is interested only in "Israel" and, of course, in their God. Direct communication from God comes not only through the prophets, but also to David and Solomon who charter the royal dynasty. Prophets take on expanded roles, including the establishment of religious music. As one contemporary interpreter has said, Chrons was always making an effort to elevate the traditions for a new generation, to bridge the gap between a dead past and a newly legitimated present. Chrons "is a

comprehensive expression of the perpetual need to renew and revitalize the religion of Israel . . . affirm the meaningfulness of contemporary life without severing ties . . ." (Japhet, *I* and *II Chronicles*, 49).

Chronicles presents the bringing together of story and history, not simply neutral history writing. When interest in Chrons or EN focused on historical veracity, the sources (edicts, letters, "memoirs," etc.) used by Chrons and EN were evaluated for their reliability. One could ask whether the first-person source or the third person account was more reliable (e.g., one could compare Neh 12:44–13:3 and 13:44-31). As interest in historiography increased, it became more crucial to examine the way these sources, or one might say the diverse genres, were woven together in the story told by Chrons or EN. Identification of the genres of the sources themselves became increasingly significant. The comparison, for example, of the ways lists or letters are used and with what intent they are employed becomes crucial. The comparison of genres and their use is important for determining the way the themes and ideas were developed in the larger work. In addition, scholars are currently contextualizing the biblical historiographical tendencies with extrabiblical history writing. More careful attention to historiographical works from Judah's neighbors in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece will further illuminate the interpretation of Chrons and EN.

Third, despite these new directions, attempts to date the composition of Chrons remain complicated. Dates all the way from ca. 525 to 200 BCE have been proposed, with some interpreters bracketing the issue and offering no judgment. Moreover, there is no correlation between dating alternatives and authorship hypotheses. In other words, those holding the diverse authorship of Chrons and EN do not opt for either an early or a late date for the composition of Chrons.

Fourth, the chronology developed in EN has always presented problems for the interpreter. Earlier attempts to correct the garbled chronology of EN's 100-150 year history in order resulted in some significant rearrangement of the text. One needed to bring a portion of Nehemiah (7:73*b*–8:18) between Ezra 7 and 8, and then Nehemiah 9–10 after Ezra 10. These changes enabled the modern interpreter to impose the "correct" history on the text. Then interpretation could proceed. Given the new impetus to examine the text as it exists, and without thinking of the text as an objective reporting of events, the interpreter is forced to look for the reasons the story is told in the way it is. Historiographic concerns now focus on the extant literature. The decision on whether to rearrange the text and then interpret it is directly related to discussions about the historical order of the figures of Ezra and Nehemiah. The relationship of these figures constitutes another persisting problem. The pendulum seems to have swung back to preserving the traditional, "biblical" order of Ezra, then Nehemiah. The actual dates of the

figures and whether or not their work overlapped or remained virtually without mutual recognition, as EN seems to imply, has evoked numerous theories (Suiter). Questions about whether or not Ezra even existed or was a necessary literary invention are still being raised.

Fifth, the most significant historical advances regarding the Persian period have not come from new material evidence. Rather, they have come from an enormous burst in research on almost every dimension of the Persian period. Some helpful cataloguing of the existing material evidence (Stern) has been undertaken. The reevaluation of data in concert with archaeology's new ties to social scientific methods (Carter, Hoglund) have produced important new understandings about this period.

We are now able to reflect more carefully about the population size and borders of the postexilic Persian province of Judah. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 suggest a sizeable population of returnees (around 40,000), and estimates, based on biblical texts, of a total population have ranged as high as 200,000. However, apart from the literary recollections of size, there are new methods of estimating populations long after they have disappeared. These estimates use ethnographic data in conjunction with archaeological material. With these newer methods, some have suggested that in the late sixth century a low population of around 11,000 existed with a population high of 17,000 in the early fourth century BCE (Carter). The geographical boundaries of Judah have been estimated to be roughly half the size of the state of Rhode Island (about 620 square miles). The picture in Neh 11:25-36 certainly suggests a larger region. This picture, however, was not designed to provide a descriptive geography, but one that indicated the ancestral attachments of returnees.

Despite the tendency to see a smaller, poorer, and less stable Judah in the sixth-fourth centuries, there remains the growing awareness that this population was in no way disconnected from the international exchanges between East and West. One merely needs to read EN to see the references to Persian rulers and the use of diverse dating procedures for events. Judah existed in a massive Persian empire. The Persian Empire stretched from Greece across Turkey just below the Black Sea and Caspian Sea and beyond Afghanistan. Circling around the Mediterranean Sea, the empire included Syria, Lebanon, Israel, across the delta of the Nile as far as Libya. Dropping down deeper into Egypt, the empire went at least as far south as Elephantine and across the Red Sea, including portions of Saudia Arabi, Jordan, Iran, Iraq, and beyond the Indus River. It has been said that a decision in Susa altered the destiny of Athens and reverberated in Jerusalem.

Not only was Judah embedded in a vast geographical landscape, so too its literature sits in a literary landscape of incredible scope. The libraries of Greece contained books of authors from approximately the same time as

Ezra and Nehemiah, i.e., Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristotle, and Demosthenes. The names of Egyptian authors, while less well known, constitute an impressive list. Interpreters of Chrons and EN will be well served by remembering that the context for understanding this literature is not merely the deuteronomistic historian or genealogies in Genesis.

Understanding the Judahite society that gave rise to Chrons and EN, and other canonical literature, within the vast Persian Empire (Davies, Eskenazi, and Richards) is of extraordinary significance. Answers to the questions of who wrote, when and why, need conceptual refinement. Understanding the way a society works helps us to determine a range of potential authors. Groups do not write, specific individuals within groups write. Furthermore, the range of individuals with appropriate skills and knowledge to write history in any culture is limited, and especially so in Persian period Judah given its small size. When Chrons seeks to revitalize an understanding of Israel, how is the interpreter to relate the material (earlier and later) Israel to the Israel of the text? The question can only be answered when one has adequately understood the sociology of the period, as well as the individual author's social stance. Greater clarity is needed in understanding and identifying the ways in which Crons and EN are related to the social terrain of Persian period Judah.

Finally, the area of most significant research in recent Persian period studies focuses on the so-called civic-temple community. The data we have gained regarding temple-cities from various historical periods has led to the conclusion that the civic-temple community is the best way to understand the Second Temple. This new temple community of returning exiles, who no doubt closely associated with certain issues in EN, were not merely a religious body who gathered in public for the reading of the Torah. They were a socio-political organization made up of the privileged, self-managing elite who controlled the agriculture, ran the bank that was housed in the temple, collected voluntary and mandatory contributions, had a workforce, and were grouped by ancestral houses headed by an elder. The priest was an administrator for the distant Persian rulers, as much as a religious figure. The returnees used the city-temple for identifying religious space and place, but also for reclaiming a political and economic place and space.

Situating the study of Chrons and EN in the broader context of the Persian period demands knowledge of classical Greek sources, studies of the Persian Empire, geographical and archeological data, and interdisciplinary socio-economic analysis. Many loose ends exist in trying to tie these broader studies to the individual problems and solutions of Chrons and EN interpretation. This agenda will occupy a good portion of the concluding years of the tweitieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## A Scenario for Study

Problems, and solutions to them, are usually predicated on the realities of the present. This is the case whether one is examining the judicial system in twentieth-century America or suggesting ways to advance our understandings of biblical literature. We are more comfortable relying on the observable present rather than leaping beyond it. We avoid looking over the rim. We look into the future too often through a rearview mirror. It may seem out of place to borrow from the futurists as we consider looking toward the twenty-first century in the study of Chrons and EN. Yet, much of the most creative historical, literary, and social scientific research devoted to these books, and to the Persian period out of which they emerge, have derived from imaginative ventures.

A number of years ago when the venture into space began, there was much discussion about simulation. Future astronauts were given various scenarios with expected, sometimes unexpected, factors, to which they needed to respond. The simulation provided opportunities to anticipate various conditions and develop more appropriate responses. As a result of that interest in simulating what it might be like when landing on the moon, some biblical interpreters began to write biblical simulation games. A story or situation from the Bible was taken, such as the garden of Eden or the story of Job, and people were given parts to play.

Inevitably groups that used these simulations went back to the text prior to acting out the story. Upon completing the simulation through a debriefing, I was always struck by how the imaginative act, a kind of role playing, drove the students to imagine what might have been. They filled in some of the silence in the texts. However, more strikingly, the play drove them back to the text, urged them to reexamine the data, helped them see imprecise formulations in the way they played the scene, and most importantly imbedded in them the importance of using diverse methods and tools when interpreting texts.

I will attempt very briefly to provide a scenario that might cause certain shifts in our understanding of Chrons and EN, as well as of the Persian period. I have imagined the discovery of a civic-temple community archive. Since we have discovered such archives from closely related periods, this is not an outlandish possibility. Just imagining such a discovery will not make it a reality. But the simulation does make it possible for an interpreter to reexamine creatively a hypothesis and formulate new responses.

The discovered archives are from a site just outside Judah near Gezer. The archives include many of the expected documents that deal with loans, rental of farmlands, lists of persons who were members of the community, as well as one that listed various administrative responsibilities of priests. A copy of

the Cyrus edict is present in both Aramaic and Hebrew. In addition, there are letters exchanged between Ezra and Nehemiah, brought to this archive in what appear to be copies of the originals that must have been in the Jerusalem Temple. Two points, among the diverse data, emerge from this discovery.

First, the data seems to imply that Chrons and EN represent closely related, but diverse understandings of leadership and community from the same basic period of time: Ezra arrived 458 BCE and Nehemiah about twenty years later in 445 BCE. EN's author says in a newly discovered letter to one of his close associates, that he, the author of EN, wanted to place his focus on the extremely important role the entire community played in the return and rebuilding. He understood the events to represent a more populist perspective. Furthermore, this author of EN says in the letter that he has been in Judah twenty years longer than the author of Chrons. The EN author wants the reader to understand that his views were more closely related to the actual occurrences of return and rebuilding. The EN author's more populist perspective than the one found in Chrons, avoids emphasizing heroic leaders. In fact, in that one letter he explicitly criticizes Nehemiah.

The new archival findings clearly indicate that there was enormous dependence on Persian authority among the returnees as well as reliance on the social, religious, and political patterns that worked in the Exile. There is a hint in one of the letters from a senior military officer, possibly a Persian convert to Judaism, that even the figures of Ezra and Nehemiah were not characters of unambiguous heroic dimensions. All of the correspondence found in the archives indicates that much confusion existed in leadership. The confusion seems to have resided in the growing tendency not to separate scribal and priestly roles. The diversity of views concerning who represented the faithful was hard to detect. Moreover, the place of several indigenous groups worshiping Yahweh remained unclear.

The archives indicate, that while Nehemiah wanted to be looked upon as a more decisive leader, he, too, failed miserably. Letters from an attaché of Nehemiah indicate that Nehemiah was called back to the Persian court and asked to justify his failures despite all the reports he had filed on a regular basis with Persian authorities in Susa.

Further documents among the archives suggest that the author of Chrons, while highly respected for having held up the Davidic and Solomonic traditions, presented a hope too late for a Judah near extinction. The reinterpretation by Chrons of the Davidic and Solomonic leadership found so explicitly in earlier sources provided a patina over the real political and economic interests that Chrons wanted to revive during the Persian period. In fact, in one letter written by the author of Chrons, he hints to a fellow

historian that he is concerned about the variations he is using in his telling of the "biblical story."

Second, within the new archives there are documents from a debate among the various factions claiming true faithfulness to the tradition. The debate centered on the meaning of the temple, about which there seems to have been an extraordinary diversity of views. A group from Elephantine had been at odds with a group of exiles who decided not to return to Judah, and hence advanced the cause of their temple in Susa. The issue of the ability to worship Yahweh in a foreign land continued to threaten the very fabric of various Jewish communities.

From all the correspondence in these newly discovered archives, the fight over who really represented the faithful seems not just to have been a battle of religious differences. It was that too, but at the center it was a battle over power within and without the communities. Every document found in the temple archives suggests that any separation of religion and politics was foreign to the competing factions.

One of the most important pieces of documentation from the archives was an exchange between the authors of Chrons and EN. There seems to have been some disagreement about the interpretation of the meaning of the Cyrus edict. They believed that they would be able to put their own "spin" on the edict. The author of EN suggests, that while he has made available to Chrons the copy of the edict, he also concedes that both will no doubt end up using it in their works. The author of EN does receive a concession from the Chrons' author that although the Chrons' author will use the edict, he will not carry his history any further into time. Therefore, the one promises to conclude his work with the edict, while the other begins his story with it.

This tactic of imagining the discovery of an archive scenario, and reporting the tendencies from the archival documents, enables the interpreter to propose solutions to old problems. Naturally, it would be easy to point out new problems that emerge from interpreting data from the new discovery. It would be a fortunate set of circumstances to find such an archive, even if it were an archive that would demonstrate the inaccuracy and impossibility of the civic-temple community concept for the Second Temple, or even that, indeed, the figure of Ezra never existed.

The material and textual evidence from the past will never be complete. Additional evidence may suggest the resolution of one issue or another, but interpreters are always faced with the incomplete information about the completed past. A more explicit effort to engage diverse scenarios will enable interpreters to understand the importance of their own role in the interpretive process, as well as the context out of which they interpret. So, even the discovery of an ancient document that suggested that the figure of Ezra most likely preceded Nehemiah would not once-and-for-all solve the meaning of

EN. Nor would the confirmation that two authors agreed to disagree on the importance and role of the Cyrus edict settle the issue of the meaning of Chrons or EN.

Explicitly placing the interpretation of Chrons and EN at the intersection of a tiny Judean province and the vast reaches of the Persian empire has made the interpretive task more complex. On the other hand, such a placement seems necessary for two documents that refer to numerous external sources, demonstrate the reconfiguration of older traditions, contain bilingual materials, refer to leaders known outside these documents, and reflect upon such classic issues as the relationship between leader and community, book and sacred place-space.

## Selected Bibliography

Ackroyd, P. *The Chronicler in His Age.* JSOTSup 101. Sheffield: JSOT, 1991.

Blenkinsopp, J. *Ezra-Nehemiah: A Commentary.* OTL. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988.

Carter, C. *A Social and Demographic Study for Post-Exilic Judah.* Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1991.

Clines, D. *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.* NCB. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984.

Davies, P., ed. *Second Temple Studies. 1. Persian Period.* JSOTSup 148. Sheffield: JSOT, 1992.

Eskenazi, T. "Current Perspectives on Ezra-Nehemiah and the Persian Period." In *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 1 (1993) 59-86.

———. *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah.* SBLMS 36. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988.

———, and K. Richards, eds., *Second Temple Studies 2. Temple Community in the Persian Period.* JSOTSup 175. Sheffield: JSOT, 1994.

Hoglund, K. *Achaemenid Administration in Syria-Palestine and the Missions of Ezra and Nehemiah.* SBLDS 125. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992.

Japhet, S. *I and II Chronicles.* OTL. Louisville: Westminister/John Knox, 1993.

———. "The Historical Reliability of Chronicles," *JSOT* 33 (1985) 83-107.

Klein, R. "Chronicles, Book of 1–2," *ABD* 1. New York: Doubleday, 1992, 992-1002.

———. "Ezra-Nehemiah, Books of," *ABD* 2. New York: Doubleday, 1992, 731-42.

Kraemer, D. "On the Relationship of the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah," *JSOT* 59 (1993) 73-92.

Noth, M. *The Chronicler's History.* JSOTSup 50. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987.

Polzin, R. *Late Biblical Hebrew: Toward an Historical Typology of Biblical Hebrew Prose.* HSM 12. Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976.

Stern, E. *Material Culture of the Land of the Bible in the Persian Period 538-332 BC.* Warminister: Avis and Phillips; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982.

Suiter, D. *The Contribution of Chronological Studies for Understanding Ezra-Nehemiah.* Ph.D. Diss., Iliff School of Theology/University of Denver, 1992.

Throntveit, M. *Ezra-Nehemiah.* IBC. Louisville: John Knox, 1992.

Williamson, H., *Ezra, Nehemiah.* WBC 16. Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1985.